Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association
SEMJA Update
February 2026

SEMJA Celebrates Lars Bjorn on March 1

Every year, the Southeast Michigan Jazz Association (SEMJA) board presents the Ron Brooks Award to individuals who have made significant contributions to the Detroit jazz community as performers and/or educators.

This year, the award, named after the organization's founder, goes to Lars Bjorn, who has led SEMJA as president for the last two dozen years.

The presentation will take place at the Kerrytown Concert House, which has partnered with our organization to celebrate Lars, at 4:00 p.m. on March 1, 2026. A short ceremony will be accompanied by of a full concert by pianist Adam Mosley, bassist Paul Keller, guitarist Ralph Tope, drummer Jesse Kramer, and a few surprise guests. Tickets are $30 and $40 and can be purchased from the Concert House website, *kerrytownconcerthouse.com.*

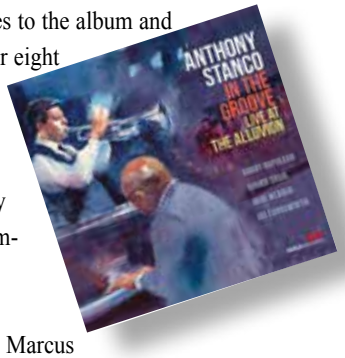
SEMJA AWARD THE RON BROOKS AWARD

See the January SEMJA Update for Piotr Michalowski's detailed background story about Lars Bjorn.

Recent Recordings by Area Artists

BY PIOTR MICHALOWSKI

The jazz faculty of Michigan State University in East Lancing has been on a CD release roll lately, bringing much praise and attracting attention to its stellar academic jazz program. The latest in this series is by trumpeter and composer Anthony Stanco: a new album, ***In the Groove: Live at the Alluvion***, with guitarist Randy Napoleon, pianist Xavier Davis, bassist John Webber, and drummer Joe Farnsworth, (*originarts.com/oa2/recordings/recording.php?TitleID=22242*), recorded almost exactly a year ago. This recording documents a show at the wonderful new Alluvium performance space in downtown Traverse City that features many kinds of music, including jazz, curated by pianist Jeff Hass, who contributed the liner notes to the album and wrote one of the tunes ("Tales"). Of the other eight tracks, only one is an older classic — Duke Pearson's "Say You're Mine," first heard on the 1962 Donald Byrd Blue Note album *The Cat Walk* — "Hey Cute One," contributed by Napoleon, and the remaining seven were composed by the leader.



Raised in the Detroit suburbs, Stanco was tutored early in his life by musicians such as Marcus Belgrave and Rodney Whittaker in the Civic Jazz Orchestra, absorbing the unique Motor City jazz ethos, moving on to the Manhattan School of Music, but finishing up his college education back in Michigan, at Michigan State in the jazz program directed by Whittaker. Eight years later, after teaching at Ohio State and Broward College, he returned to the school as assistant professor of jazz trumpet. On this album, just as on his previous four, Stanco celebrates his dedication to the bebop/hard-bop legacy, with his own take on the Detroit traditions instilled in him while still a teenager mentored by notable elders, with its characteristic accent on precise technical instrumental mastery as a vehicle for passionate expression, often with the blues in mind. A good example of all of this is found right away on the second track, the aforementioned "Say You're Mine." The arrangement of the head essentially follows the Donald Byrd version, but whereas his predecessor, not that much older at the time, used a mute, stressing the somewhat melancholy spirit of the minor key blues-like tune, Stanco plays with open horn, tipping his hat to his Detroit precursor, but more assertive and declarative. He cues in Napoleon, who takes his time to build an atmospheric bluesy solo, handing it over to Stanco, who stays very much in the same vein, accentuating the blues, bending and smearing notes, making a compact forceful statement. When Stanco picks up a mute, as on the boogaloo title tune, he goes all out, laying on the funk. Throughout, one hears the close musical bonds between the band members, who clearly share aesthetic and stylistic attitudes, reinforced by personal relationships.

This is very much a performance recording, structured with audience entertainment in mind, sometimes bringing to mind Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. The tempos, rhythms, and timbral arrangements vary-- there is even a short band vocal on "Sonny Boy." Stanco is a declared traditionalist who does not hide his allegiance to Byrd, Lee Morgan, or Clifford Brown, but he has forged his own take on the hard-bop style, and his impressive command of the trumpet serves him well but is never used for simple effect. All in all, this was obviously a wonderful evening at the Alluvion, shared with us by the full and clear recording to savor at will.

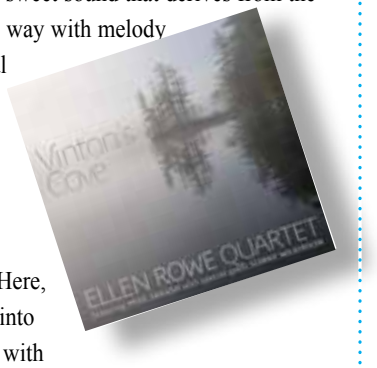
The faculty of the Michigan State School of Music are not just teachers. They are mentors as their commitment to students clearly reaches far beyond the classroom and they often involve them in their professional performances. To cite but one example, for his recent album *Waking Dream* guitar professor Randy Napoleon brought back four of his former students. Trombonist Nanami Haruta has just released her debut recording, and her teachers were not only featured sidemen, but also contributed their own compositions to the project, and her mentor Michael Dease coproduced it. The CD is ***Nanami Haruta, The Vibe*** (*originarts.com/recordings/recording.php?TitleID=82911*), with Michael Dease on trombone and baritone saxophone on five tracks, Xavier Davis on piano, Rodney Whitaker on bass, Ulysses Owens Jr. on drums, and on one tune, recent alumnus Chris Minami on guitar. Dease joins Haruta on five tracks, another five feature her in a quartet setting, and the final one finds her in the intimate company of just guitar and bass.

Played on a blindfold test, one would never even begin to think that this was a debut album by a recent college graduate. Haruta has full technical command of her instrument, with remarkable tonal control and jazz phrasing, her solos demonstrate melodic and harmonic mastery of post-bop jazz traditions, reflecting the style of music making preferred by her Michigan State mentors. Her approach to the trombone lies fully in the J. J. Johnson lineage but she has already managed to find her own stylistic persona within this methodology, with a recognizable warm tonal palate. The album is organized in a manner that features the full range of her talents. Her musical maturity is well on display on the first few tunes where she works alongside her teacher Dease, matching him fully with delight. Once we get to the second half of the recital where she works alone with the rhythm section, the accent is more on her wistful and romantic side, as the tempos slow down, and she tells her stories with passionate imagination. By the time we reach the final tune, "Unchained Melody," the one standard here, she revels in her ballad artistry, accompanied only by Minami and Whittaker. A perfect final moment in a remarkable album of mainstream modern jazz.

Late this fall, Ellen Rowe, a University of Michigan music professor with a heavy performance schedule at home and throughout the country, released her sixth compact disc recording that features her piano, compositions, and arrangements in a new quartet; ***Vinton's Cove*** (*ellenrowe.bandcamp.com/album/vintons-cove*) features Mike Sakash, alto and soprano saxophones, Dennis Carroll, bass, Pete Siers, drums, and vocalist Sunny Wilkinson on two tunes.

Of the ten tracks, six were written by the leader, two are old standards, plus one each by Kenny Warner and Joni Mitchell. The CD title references Rowe's family cabin in Maine, where she has spent summers since childhood, and so it opens with her composition "The Loons of Vinton's Cove," referencing a pair of birds that return there every spring and attempt, against all odds of nature, to bring a chick or two to maturity. At a brisk, rolling tempo, this provides a perfect introduction to the unique quartet of musicians. The only one who has worked regularly with Rowe before is her longtime favorite drummer Pete Siers.

Bassist Dennis Carroll, well-known in Chicago, is a recent acquaintance, as is saxophonist/clarinetist Mike Sakash, a neighbor in Maine, where he has been working for some years at the Fryeburg Academy, currently chairing the arts department. His approach to the alto saxophone catches you by surprise, very much against the current grain, with a warm sweet sound that derives from the Paul Desmond lineage, and a sparse, precise way with melody that fits perfectly with Rowe's compositional and arranging concepts. The quartet swings together so well that one would never suspect that it is not a regularly working band.



By contrast, Rowe's characteristically contemplative ballad "Refractions" features Sakash's full-sounding soprano saxophone. Here, the musical kinship between the two comes into full focus, as they build their solos together, with effective dynamic shading. The recital is meticulously designed, with diverse tempos, moods, and orchestrations. The delicate "Sylvan Way" is a perfectly intuitive duet with Sunny Wilkinson, who shines in a very different mode on the brisk samba "The Phoenix." Mitchell's "Both Sides Now," hardly a jazz standard, reveals new improvisatory prospects in an introspective trio setting.

Ellen Rowe prepares each of her recordings with great care so that they all differ substantially and reveal new perspectives on her art. On *Vinton's Cove* she has once again succeeded in evenly balancing her compositional, arranging, improvisatory, and leadership skills to create a highly personal musical statement, programming the whole so that each track acquires full meaning as part of a whole. Her compositions are often organically realized only in specific arrangements in which her piano is an essential orchestral element but are also created or recreated to accommodate the personalities of her fellow musicians, in this case, for example, exploiting the unique stylistic qualities of Mike Sakash's approach to his instruments, which differs substantially from the styles of her usual saxophone companions. Therefore, to fully experience the artistry at play here, put this on and listen from beginning to end.

Blue LLama and Other Venues in February

Local venues are busy this month.

Cliff Bells opens February with drummer Louis Jones III and his group featuring trumpeter Allen Dennard. On February 6, the club celebrates its 20th anniversary with the Michael Jellick quartet. Jellick is a prominent pianist with lots of technique and creativity. He was born in India, raised in Livonia, and has performed with Bobby McFerrin, Christian McBride, Rodney Whitaker, James Carter, Marion Hayden, and many others. His nearly ten-year-long stay at the Northern Lights Lounge, (in Detroit) where he led a jam session, is by now legendary.

The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis perform at Hill Auditorium on February 7 in a program called Duke in Africa. Ellington visited Africa in 1966 and composed several Africa-inspired works such as the Liberian Suite.

The Blue LLama in Ann Arbor features bassist/bandleader Ron Brooks on February 5, and Toledo's vocalist Ramona Collins and her quartet on February 25.

WEMU 89.1

The Choice for NPR... news, jazz and blues.

Schedule

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
5							
6						PUBJAZZ	PUBJAZZ
7		MORNING EDITION NPR news, information, and public affairs Local news, traffic and weather with David Fair					REVEAL
8						WEEKEND EDITION Scott Simon	WEEKEND EDITION Rachel Martin
9							
10		89.1 JAZZ MORNING Hosted by Michael Jewett				THIS AMERICAN LIFE	SUNDAY BEST Nik Thompson
11						WAIT, WAIT... DON'T TELL ME!	
12		PUBJAZZ				TRAVEL Rick Steves	
1						FROM MEMPHIS TO MOTOWN Wendy Wright	GROOVEYARD Daniel W. Long
2		89.1 JAZZ AFTERNOON Hosted by Michael Jewett					
3							THE IN CROWD Jessica Webster
4		ALL THINGS CONSIDERED NPR news, information & public affairs				ROOTS MUSIC PROJECT Jeremy Baldwin	
5							BIG CITY BLUES CRUISE Joe Tiboni
6							
7					REVEAL	CUBAN FANTASY Marc Taras	MOUNTAIN STAGE Larry Groce
8					ALL SONGS CONSIDERED		
9					ALT.LATINO		JAZZ NIGHT IN AMERICA
10					MOUNTAIN STAGE Larry Groce		
11							
12		PUBJAZZ					
1							
2							
3							
4							

National Public Radio
Eastern Michigan University

jazz events
February

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

ATTENTION all venue owners, musicians, and listeners
Please let us know about upcoming jazz events in the area!

- Write us at SEMJA
  3020 Bolgos Circle
  Ann Arbor MI 48105
- Phone us at 734-668-7470
- Submit information online at *www.semja.org/submit*

We will include notices if they reach us by the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Aretha's Jazz Café at Music Hall

jazzcafedetroit.com
350 Madison
DETROIT 313-887-8500

FEBRUARY

2	7:00	Take Five

ONGOING

Sun	7:00	Aretha's Jazz Jam

Baker's Keyboard Lounge

theofficialbakerskeyboardlounge.com
20510 Livernois
DETROIT 313-345-6300

ONGOING

Fri	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams
Sat	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams

Blue LLama Jazz Club

bluellamaclub.com
314 South Main St.
ANN ARBOR 734-372-3200

FEBRUARY

1	6:00	Sandra Bomar Quartet
4	7:00	Jauron Perry Quartet
5	7:00	Ron Brooks Quintet
6	4:00	WEMU 5:01 Jazz Series: organissimo
6	7:00	Tariq Gardner & Evening Star
7	7:00	Olivia Van Goor Quartet
8	6:00	Bob Mervak
11	7:00	Great Lakes Brass
12	7:00	Aguankó
15	6:00	Chris Glassman & the Technocats
18	7:00	Nate Topo Quintet
19	7:00	Ken Kozora Quartet
20	4:00	Kerrytown Stompers
20	7:00	Nate Winn Group
21	7:00	Sean Dobbins All Star Quintet
22	6:00	Jordan Anderson Trio
25	7:00	Ramona Collins Quartet
26	7:00	Houston Patton & Hidden Nomination
28	7:00	Chico Pinheiro + Kzoo Jazz Project

Olivia Van Goor

Cadieux Café

cadieuxcafe.com
4300 Cadieux Rd.
DETROIT 313-882-8560

FEBRUARY

15	3:00	Motor City Josh Big Band
22	4:00	Planet D Nonet

ONGOING

Thu	8:00	Bill Meyer Group – with Ibrahim Jones, Butter Hawkins

Cliff Bells

cliffbells.com
2030 Park Ave at West Adams
DETROIT 313-961-2543

FEBRUARY

1	5:30 7:30	Louis Jones III – featuring Allen Dennard
4	7:00	Swing Syndicate Jazz Lab
5	7:30 9:30	Sean Dobbins Organ Trio
6	7:30 9:30	Michael Jellick Quartet
7	7:30 9:30	DeSean Jones UAO – with Blaque Dynamite
12	7:30 9:30	CANJA de BOA
13	7:30 9:30	Easy Street Jazz Band
14	5:00 10:00	Valentine's Day Dinner and a Show
15	5:30 7:30	Kimmie Horne
19	7:30 9:30	La Cecille and The Eastside Banda
20, 21	7:30 9:30	Vincent Chandler Experience
26–28	7:30 9:30	Planet D Nonet

ONGOING

Wed	7:30 9:30	Houston Patton Quartet and Session

Kimmie Horne

Dirty Dog Jazz Café

dirtydogjazz.com
97 Kercheval
GROSSE PTE. FARMS 313-882-5299

FEBRUARY

5	6:00	Planet D Nonet
6, 7	6:30	Planet D Nonet
12	6:00	The GUD Band
13, 14	6:30	The GUD Band
26	6:00	Tumbao Bravo
27, 28	6:30	Tumbao Bravo

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Michael Zaporski

The Earle

theearle.com
121 West Washington St.
ANN ARBOR 734-994-0211

ONGOING

Tue	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Wed	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Thu	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Fri	7:00	Jazz Trio
Sat	7:00	Jazz Trio

Jake Reichbart

Elks Lodge #325

110 West Ann Arbor Trail
PLYMOUTH

ONGOING

Sat	6:00	Open Jam Session – with Pete Siers, Kenji Lee, Andy Peck, Max Bowen

Hill Auditorium

ums.org
University of Michigan Campus
ANN ARBOR

FEBRUARY

5	11 am	Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis
6	7:30	Wynton Marsalis Symphony No. 4
7	7:30	Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis: Duke in Africa
15	4:00	Terence Blanchard & Ravi Coltrane: Miles Davis & John Coltrane Centennial

Imaginate Restaurant

imaginaterestaurant.com
401 South Lafayette Ave.
ROYAL OAK 248-633-8899

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Eat It Up Trio

Kerrytown Concert House

kerrytownconcerthouse.com
415 North Fourth Ave.
ANN ARBOR 734-769-2999

FEBRUARY

13	7:30	Mr. B's Birthday Bounce – with special guest Ali Jackson
28	7:30	Eastern Boundary Quartet

London Chop House

155 West Congress St.
DETROIT

ONGOING

Thu	7:30	Paul Keller, Paul King, Ralph Tope, Adam Mosley

Lucille's Jazz Lounge

lucillesjazzlounge.com
1447 North Summit St., Suite C
TOLEDO, OH

FEBRUARY

6	8:00	Keigo Hirakawa & David Bixler
7	8:00	Hepcat Revival
13	8:00	Chris Buzzelli Quartet
14	8:00	Sheila Fleming
19	8:00	Ariel Kasler Quartet
20	8:00	The Quick Trio
21	8:00	Tiffany Gridiron
28	8:00	The Whiskey Charmers

Shield's

25101 Telegraph Rd.
SOUTHFIELD

FEBRUARY

14	1:00	Craig Strain Orchestra
28	1:00	James Dapogny's Chicago Blues Band

Venue by 4M

experience4m.com
1919 South Industrial Hwy.
ANN ARBOR 734-800-0128

ONGOING

Sun	11 am	Jazz Sunday Brunch
Sat	7:00	Saturday Night Jazz

Weber's Habitat Lounge

thehabitatannarbor.com
3050 Jackson Rd.
ANN ARBOR 734-665-3636

ONGOING

Mon	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Tue	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Wed	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Thu	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Sun	5:00	William Marshall Bennett

Zal Gaz Grotto

zalgaz.org
2070 West Stadium Blvd.
ANN ARBOR 734-663-1202

ONGOING

Sun	5:00	Phil Ogilvie's Rhythm Kings
Mon	7:00	Paul Keller Orchestra
Tue	5:30	Paul Klinger's Easy Street Jazz Band

Upcoming Jazz Events

MARCH

1	**SEMJA Presents Ron Brooks Award to Lars Bjorn • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor**
1	One Single Rose • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
1	The Coffee House Combo • Mackenzie Hall, Windsor ON
4	Alex Anest Trio• Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
4	Lisa Sung • Schoolcraft College, Livonia
5 – 7	Zen Zedravec • Dirty Dog, Grosse Pointe Farms
5	Detroit Riddim Crew • Cliff Bells, Detroit
6	Don Hicks • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
7	Tatiana Eva-Marie • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
8	Anthony Stanco • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
11	Mercer Patterson Quintet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
12 – 14	Houston Patton • Dirty Dog, Grosse Pointe Farms
12	New Nostalgia • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
12, 13	Damon Terrell • Cliff Bells, Detroit
13	Pamela Wise • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
14	Immanuel Wilkins • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
15	Ellen Rowe's All About the Trio: Dave Brubeck • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor
15	Nick Collins Trio • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
18	Lisa Sung Quartet• Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
19 – 21	Blou Reed • Dirty Dog, Grosse Pointe Farms
19	Randy Napoleon • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
20	Linda May Han Oh • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
21	Laura Simone Quintet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
22	Sunny Wilkinson Trio • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
25	Gwenyth Hayes Trio • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
26	Detroit Jazz Project • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
27	Olivia Van Goor Sings the Music of Anita O'Day • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor
27	Sean Dobbins Organ Trio – featuring Dana Badcock • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
28	Joan Belgrave • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
29	Paul Vornhagen Quartet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor

3020 Bolgos Circle
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 240
Ann Arbor, MI

Membership

Buddy Booker
Mick and Sally Fee
Carol Fossee
Carol Keller
Michael Kennard
Ron Kramer
Michael D. Lewis
Len Lofstrom
Sandra Maconochie
Quincy Northrup

The Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association

(SEMJA) was formed in 1987 for the purpose of promoting understanding and appreciation of jazz as an art form. The organization is comprised of professional musicians, jazz scholars, jazz writers, club owners, broadcasters and listeners. The organization operates through a Board and with a volunteer staff.

SEMJA is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Inquiries

All mail should be sent to SEMJA,
3020 Bolgos Circle,
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
For phone messages
call: 734.668.7470
email: *semja@semja.org*

Publication

The *SEMJA Update* is published monthly and sent to members at no cost. It is edited by Lars Bjorn and Piotr Michalowski with additional assistance from Barton Polot (production editor), Margot Campos (layout), and Jeff Gaynor.

SEMJA online

website: *www.semja.org*
social: *facebook.com/semja.org*

SEMJA Board Meeting

The SEMJA Board meets normally on the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. The meeting on February 17 will be held online via video conferencing (Zoom). Please call Lars at 734-353-3568 if you have questions.

Board Members

Lars Bjorn, *President*
Piotr Michalowski, *Vice-president*
Jeff Gaynor, *Secretary, Treasurer*
Barton Polot, *Webmaster and Managing Editor*
Ron Brooks, *President Emeritus*

Ira Lax
Kenji Lee
Ingrid Racine
Ellen Rowe
Sandy Schopbach
Linda Yohn

SEMJA Membership Application

Mail to: SEMJA • 3020 Bolgos Circle.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

❑ New Member
❑ Renewal

Membership Levels

❑ Basic	$30
❑ Student	$20
❑ Couple	$40
❑ Patron	$60
❑ Nonprofit Corp.	$50
❑ Corporate	$250
❑ Lifetime	$500

Amount Enclosed $_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

❑ Check payable to **SEMJA** ❑ Credit Card |___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|

Exp. |___|___| / |___|___| CVV |___|___|___|